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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, September 20, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Soap Facts." Information from the Extension Service, the Bureau of Home Economics, the Food and Drug Administration, and from an article "The Truth About Soap" appearing in the Readers' Digest for August, 1934.

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Speaking of economy and wise buying, as we're all doing these days -- speaking of economy, did you ever consider what an item soap is on the household budget? Did you ever sit down and figure up just how much soap your family uses in a year and how much it costs? Here's a common, everyday substance that can make quite a dent in your pocketbook.

That's why in these last few hard years so many rural homemakers have learned to make their own soap, just as their thrifty grandmothers and great-grandmothers did. The fat that used to go to waste on many a farm goes into the soap kettle these days. Surplus fat from cooking or from home butchering, even fat that has become rancid is being converted into homemade laundry and cleaning soap that saves many precious household pennies.

Well, making your own is one way to save money on soap. Another way is to buy soap wisely. I can't tell you to read the label on the soap and buy accordingly, for the present Food and Drug law does not regulate soap or cosmetics. Unfortunately, most of us don't know the simple facts about this very common material. So we may be spending our good money on fancy names or fancy claims when all we want or need is mild, pure soap.

You may pay fifty cents or a dollar a cake for a beautifully colored, sweetly scented imported soap with the mark of a famous foreign perfumer on it. If you want to pay that much for color and odor and a foreign name, that is your own business.

But if you only want a good, economical soap, if you want to pay for quality and usefulness rather than frills, that's another story. Don't be misled into supposing that certain soaps are expensive because they contain mysterious or very precious ingredients with magic qualities. In general, no soap can have any special quality beyond being a good cleansing agent. And dye and perfume can cover a multitude of soap-making sins. If you buy an imported soap, you may be getting an article that as soap is much inferior to the better American grades selling for much less. American soaps are as good as soaps made in any other country -- often better.

Price is no sure guide to quality in soap. Neither are any special claims such as those often made for "complexion" soaps. For toilet use what every wise person wants is simply a mild, pure soap. Soap is "mild" if it



contains no free alkali. And chemists consider soap "pure" if it contains no foreign ingredients or adulterants. Mildness or lack of free alkali is perhaps the greatest single virtue any toilet soap can have. You see, free alkali irritates and dries the skin. Yet some toilet soaps, even expensive soaps, do contain free alkali. And even the finest perfume and the most attractive coloring won't make up for this defect.

Old soap-makers used to test soap by touching it lightly with the tip of the tongue. If the soap gave a strong biting sensation, then they knew that free alkali was present and that the soap was not suitable for toilet use. This is a test that any woman can apply when selecting soap for the family.

Most of us have come to believe many things about soap that the scientists say are mistakes. For example, most of us think that a floating soap is likely to be purer than one that sinks to the bottom of the bathtub. Now any soap at all, even the poorest, will float if during its manufacture it has been whipped so that air bubbles have been beaten into it. When you buy a floating soap, you may or may not get a mild, pure soap, but you will be buying air and water in that cake as well as soap.

Another mistaken idea that many people have is that transparency is a sure sign of purity in soap. Actually, transparency comes from some substance added to the soap mixture. Either sugar or rosin will give that clear, transparent look. Rosin has some value in a laundry soap but certainly isn't desirable in a toilet soap.

The magic word "Castile" no longer is a guide for those of us who go to buy soap. Originally, Castile soap was an imported product made entirely from olive oil. Such a soap has certain advantages. Olive oil soap is probably the mildest of all soaps and, therefore, especially suited for babies and those whose skins are sensitive to cocoanut, palm and such oils that most toilet soaps contain. But today so-called Olive oil castile soap may contain practically no olive oil at all.

Many people are willing to pay a high price for soaps alleged to be of special value for curing certain skin ills. The scientists say, however, that any good toilet soap will do as much as these expensive and widely advertised germicidal soaps. Soap in itself is a mild antiseptic. Its chief value is its power to wash away dirt and bacteria. For an added disinfectant to be really effective it would have to be present in such large amounts as to make the soap unsalable or unfit for domestic use.

The truth is that the chief effects of all these so-called therapeutic additions as well as all special beautifying ingredients in soap is to interfere with the action of the soap, to make it less efficient in its work of cleansing.

If you want the most effective and economical toilet soap, the kind to buy is a plain, mild, pure soap. This is the kind of soap to use in washing silks, wools and colored fabrics as well as all delicate fabrics. But for heavy laundry work you may need a stronger soap.



